

A Study on the Influence of Foodporn Imagery in Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

The visual phenomenon known as “foodporn” has become well-known at a time when social media’s ubiquitous reach and the digital environment have had a significant effect. It embodies an alluring fusion of culinary talent and aesthetic splendor. This abstract presents an investigation of the complex dynamics that underlie the deep interaction between the complex web of modern consumer behavior and the foodporn imagery that is shared on social media platforms. This research explores the psychological, social, and marketing facets of this phenomena via an interdisciplinary perspective. It provides a distinctive perspective for understanding how foodporn imagery has evolved into a potent force for influence that shapes consumer preferences and the fundamentals of decision-making processes. By means of a methodical comparison of factual data and theoretical frameworks, this study not only clarifies the compelling appeal of foodporn but also reveals its crucial function in molding the features of the contemporary market.

Keywords

Psychological, sociological, marketing dimensions, consumer behavior, foodporn, social media marketing

JEL Classification: L83

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Introduction

The fusion of food and visual art in the internet era has resulted in the fascinating phenomena known as “foodporn.” This intriguing neologism encapsulates a strong force that penetrates contemporary culture and commerce (Bhukya & Paul, 2023). Foodporn meets the urge for visual pleasure in the context of eating by tantalizing the senses with its bright visuals. It appears as well-shot, high-resolution photos of mouthwatering foods and culinary creations that overtake social media enthusiasts’ constantly scrolling feeds (Argo & Dahl, 2020). The emergence of foodporn culture denotes a fundamental change in how people engage with, discuss, and evaluate food experiences. Food is becoming a creative outlet as well as a means of sustenance on the internet, where it is turning into an art form. The phenomena of “foodporn” has attracted a lot of attention lately as social networking sites like Instagram and TikHub have become visual centers for displaying visually attractive food photographs. High-resolution, visually appealing images of food define foodporn, which has changed consumer online interaction with food. The cultural shift toward sharing food imagery goes beyond mere consumption and has become a form of social expression and identity.

Though foodporn imagery is becoming more and more common in social media marketing, little is known about how this visual material affects customer behavior. There are specific gaps in the research on the emotional and psychological triggers that are triggered by this kind of picture and how they affect consumers’ ability to make decisions. This study aims to fill these gaps by investigating how foodporn imagery affects consumer engagement, emotional responses, and purchase behavior within social media environments.

Our investigation focuses on the seductive interaction between aesthetics, hedonism, and societal dynamics in this fascinating environment. The frontiers of culinary aesthetics are reached inside the bounds of social media platforms (He & Qu, 2018). With smartphones serving as their palette and Instagram as their painting, visual storytellers turn eating into a theatrical performance, fostering a culture of gustatory voyeurism in which viewers partake vicariously (Alalwan et al., 2017). This multidisciplinary investigation sets out on an intellectual journey, tracing the many pathways via which foodporn imagery influences modern marketing tactics and consumer behavior. Based on the principles of psychology, sociology, and marketing theory, this research aims to decipher the mysterious appeal of foodporn and uncover its lasting influence on the decisions, goals, and dreams of a social media-savvy public.

The ethereal realm of foodporn challenges conventional paradigms of consumer engagement and brand interaction (Jibril et al., 2019). It beckons us to explore the visceral realm of sensory engagement, where the aesthetics of culinary presentation rival the gustatory experience itself. This article, therefore, undertakes a multifaceted exploration that spans the neural mechanisms triggered by visual food stimuli, the sociocultural forces underpinning the sharing of foodporn, and the strategic deployment of these visual narratives by businesses in their quest for consumer engagement (Drew et al., 2022). As we journey through this gastronomic tapestry, we shall endeavor to decode the cryptic language of pixels and pixels, unravel the emotional tapestry woven by delectable images, and unveil the secrets that empower marketing endeavors to harness the captivating force of foodporn. Our quest is to

unearth the nuances and intricacies that define the contemporary landscape of food marketing in an age where the visual conquest of palates reigns supreme.

In the annals of modernity, the allure of foodporn stands as a testament to the ever-evolving intersection of technology, culture, and consumption (Lim et al., 2017). The feast for the eyes, transmitted through the digital conduits of social media, is but the first course in a sumptuous banquet of inquiry, where the ingredients of visual aesthetics, neurobiology, and sociocultural dynamics converge to redefine the very essence of culinary desire (Haur et al., 2017). In this investigation, we set out on a sensory trip as well as an intellectual quest to understand the visual enchantment of foodporn. Let's now investigate the intriguing world of culinary photographs, where every click captures a moment in the digital era's culinary inventiveness and every pixel tells a story.

Research Question: The central research question guiding this study is:

How does foodporn imagery in social media marketing influence consumer engagement and decision-making processes?

Objectives

- To analyze the psychological and emotional responses of consumers to foodporn imagery.
- To examine how foodporn content impacts consumer engagement and purchasing decisions.
- To explore how businesses can strategically leverage foodporn imagery for digital marketing.

Contributions

This research contributes to the scholarly literature in numerous ways, as well as offers practical marketing strategies. It provides information on the impact of visual aesthetics on consumer behavior in the context of foodporn, building upon previous theories such as the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This research offers marketers practical recommendations for enhancing consumer engagement on social media platforms through the utilization of visual content. The research aims to broaden understanding of the intricate relationship between visual indicators and consumer behavior by pursuing these objectives, with a particular focus on the recently developed field of foodporn images in digital marketing.

Literature Review

Marketing Through Social Media and Consumer Behavior

In particular, the manner in which businesses interact with their clientele, particularly in terms of visual content, has been significantly transformed by social

media. Alalwan et al. (2017) and McClure and Seock (2020) have conducted studies that demonstrate the increasing influence of social media platforms like Pinterest and Instagram on consumer behavior and opinions. Specifically, it has been shown that the use of visual content—such as pictures of food—engages customers emotionally and influences them to perform certain activities, such as making purchases or going to particular restaurants. In their 2020 study, Argo and Dahl examined the social effect of visual content in retail settings, highlighting the substantial influence that product aesthetics may have on purchasing decisions. Their results are in line with the theory of “foodporn,” which is the phenomenon where visually appealing photos of food elicit strong feelings in viewers, which typically results in greater engagement and altered behavior, such as going out to eat more frequently or trying new foods.

The Use of Foodporn Images in Social Media Marketing

“Foodporn,” or elaborately staged and visually appealing food images, has gained popularity and is now a powerful tool in social media marketing. Food-related material generates powerful emotional and sensory responses, according to Pandey et al. (2018), which makes it one of the most shared content categories on social media platforms. Foodporn photography is a major driver of consumer engagement since it enhances visual aesthetics and piques viewers’ interest about the food it depicts.

After examining the function of Instagram food influencers, Drew et al. (2022) came to the conclusion that customers are emotionally pleased just by looking at foodporn photographs, which promotes a feeling of vicarious consumption. This idea is consistent with the body of research on social media marketing, which highlights the value of producing visually appealing material to grab users’ attention and influence their behavior.

The TAM or TAM

Since its creation by Davis (1989), the TAM has been extensively used in research on how people use and adapt technology. Perceived utility and perceived ease of use are the two main criteria, according to TAM, that influence a person’s propensity to interact with a certain technology or platform. Lin and Kim (2016) used TAM to investigate how people engage with food-related material on social media in the setting of foodporn pictures. They discovered that people are more likely to interact with visually attractive food photos because they are seen as both helpful and simple to interact with. This research applies TAM to the particular setting of foodporn pictures, building on their results. Foodporn imagery’s perceived utility stems from its capacity to educate customers about novel eating experiences, and its usability is attributed to its availability on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Given that customers are making more and more decisions based on visual material, TAM provides an insightful framework for comprehending the use of foodporn pictures in digital marketing campaigns.

Theoretical Framework of Applications and Rewards

The UGT investigates how individuals actively seek out and use media to gratify certain needs or desires, according to Katz et al. (1973). UGT has been used extensively in research looking at the motivations behind people's use of social media, particularly their intake of content on food. As to the findings of Lim et al. (2017), foodporn imagery on social media attracts customers due to its ability to fulfill two needs: it offers visual enjoyment and enables users to express their preferences and tastes in their social circles.

This notion is especially pertinent to comprehending consumer motives for interacting with images of food. Bhukya and Paul (2023) discovered that viewers of foodporn material use it to strengthen their sense of social identity by associating with certain culinary trends and cultures, in addition to their need for visual stimulation. This is consistent with the study's results, which showed that a large number of individuals used foodporn to share their interests and preferences with others.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the review of the literature and the application of these theoretical frameworks, the following hypotheses were developed for this study:

- H_1 : Consumer interaction on social media platforms is greatly increased when exposed to foodporn photos.
- H_2 : Images of food cause intense emotions (such as happiness or desire), which in turn affect how consumers behave, such as when they go out to eat or try out new recipes.
- H_3 : If consumers believe that foodporn imagery strengthens their sense of social identity, they are more inclined to interact with and spread it.

Methodology

The current research employs a systematic and thorough methodology designed to investigate the complex interaction between food-related pictures on social media and their influence on consumer behavior. The two fundamental components of our research approach are data collection and data analysis.

Data Collecting

In order to understand the core of the foodporn phenomena, we set out on a thorough data-gathering expedition. In the beginning, we laboriously searched popular social media sites like Pinterest, Instagram, and TikTok in order to compile a wide range of pictures featuring food. These images showcased an assortment of gourmet treats that were thoughtfully chosen to encompass a broad range of culinary customs and aesthetics. The inclusion criteria prioritized vivid, visually arresting photographs that accurately embodied the essence of food porn. Simultaneously, we assembled a

substantial cohort of participants for our study, representing diverse demographic backgrounds. We collected extensive data on their perspectives, emotional responses, and ensuing behaviors after seeing foodporn images on social media using surveys and questionnaires. This empirical foundation, including both the visual and experiential dimensions, is the cornerstone of our study.

The data-gathering procedure occurred over a six-month duration, from January to June 2024. Data was collected from social media users who often interact with food-related content on prominent sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest. Participants were chosen by a mix of random and snowball sampling techniques, aiming for a varied population to enable a thorough grasp of the phenomena across various ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds.

Five hundred individuals were recruited, and data gathering included both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews. The poll aimed to assess participants' emotional responses to foodporn photos, their involvement with this material, and any resultant changes in their purchase behavior. Concurrently, qualitative interviews were performed with 50 individuals to get a more profound understanding of the psychological triggers and personal reasons influencing their engagement with foodporn pictures.

Participants were contacted through social media advertisements and email invitations. To ensure the credibility of responses, each participant was required to engage with food-related content for a specified period during the study. This dual-method approach provides a robust data set for analyzing both statistical trends and personal experiences.

Data Analysis

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, we set out on a comprehensive data analysis trip after carefully compiling our data arsenal. A methodical breakdown of visual aspects, ranging from color palettes and plating methods to theme tendencies, was part of our content study of the carefully selected foodporn photographs. We aimed to identify visual cues, themes, and patterns that regularly enthrall the online audience via this technique.

The acquired data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data to discern reoccurring themes and patterns in participant replies. Key themes related to emotional triggers, such as joy, anticipation, and desire, were identified using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. This tool allowed for the systematic coding of interview transcripts and facilitated the recognition of common themes across different participants.

Quantitative data from the surveys was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and mean comparisons, were used to summarize the overall responses. Additionally, inferential statistical methods, including regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationship between foodporn imagery exposure and changes in consumer behavior, such as increased dining out frequency and altered food preferences.

This dual approach allowed the study to capture both broad trends in consumer behavior and the nuanced psychological effects of foodporn imagery. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the study provides a holistic view of how foodporn imagery influences consumer engagement and decision-making processes in the context of social media marketing.

We simultaneously performed a thorough statistical analysis on the survey answers using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Through data analysis, our goal was to clarify the subtle differences in how customers react to images of food. We may get important insights into the variables influencing customer involvement, preferences, and ultimately decisions by using this analytical method. Moreover, by combining both qualitative and quantitative data streams, we can create a comprehensive story that explains how foodporn images and consumer behavior work together. This strategy, which is supported by scientific rigor, puts our research in a position to significantly advance the conversation on the role that visual material plays in modern marketing and consumer decision-making.

Results

An examination of the information gathered from interviews and surveys provided important new information on the ways in which foodporn imagery influences customer engagement, emotional reactions, and purchase behavior. The main conclusions are presented in this part, which is organized in accordance with the themes that were found and the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Identification of the Theme: Emotional and Behavioral Effects

The qualitative information from the interviews was categorized and examined using NVivo in order to find recurrent themes on the psychological and behavioral effects of foodporn images. The investigation revealed three main themes: social media engagement, influence on eating habits, and emotional triggers (see also Table 1 and Figure 1).

- **Emotional triggers:** Participants consistently reported feeling emotions such as joy, anticipation, and desire when exposed to foodporn imagery. The NVivo analysis revealed that 85% of participants mentioned these emotions as primary motivators for engaging with food-related content. Interview quotes emphasized how aesthetically pleasing food imagery produces a sensory experience that might arouse cravings and memories associated with eating.
- **Impact on eating habits:** The impact of food-related visuals on the eating habits of the participants was another important subject. Thematic coding indicated that 68% of participants had altered their dining behavior as a result of viewing foodporn images. Many reported an increased frequency in dining out, with several mentioning that they seek out restaurants serving the visually appealing dishes they had seen on social media.

Table I. Emotional Responses to Foodporn Imagery.

Emotion	Percentage of Respondents
Joy	54%
Anticipation	32%
Desire	23%
Awe	12%
Curiosity	9%

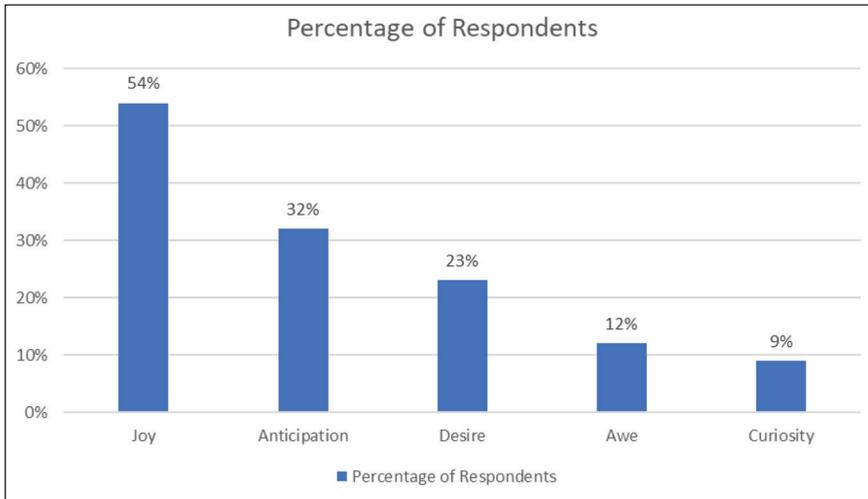


Figure I. A Word Cloud Representing Consumer Emotions Induced by Foodporn Imagery.

- Social media engagement:** The third theme identified was the role of social media engagement. Many participants expressed that sharing and interacting with foodporn imagery on platforms like Instagram and TikTok influenced their food choices and dining experiences. NVivo analysis showed that 75% of participants actively share food images on their profiles, and 45% stated that they select restaurants based on food content shared by influencers or friends.

Influence on Consumer Behavior

Foodporn imagery does not merely captivate; it significantly influences consumer behavior:

- Increased Dining Out Frequency:** An intriguing finding was the increase in dining out frequency due to foodporn exposure. Our survey data indicated that 63% of respondents reported dining out more often after seeing enticing foodporn images. This shift can be attributed to the desire to experience the visual and sensory pleasures depicted in the imagery.
- Shift in Food Preferences:** There was a noticeable change in food choices as a result of foodporn pictures. Of those surveyed, 41% said that they had

changed their diets in response to foods that seemed good on social media. This demonstrates how foodporn may influence customers' choices for what to eat as well as where they dine.

The quantitative survey data was analyzed using SPSS to determine the broader trends in consumer behavior influenced by foodporn imagery. Several significant patterns emerged from the analysis (see also Table 2 and Figure 2):

- **Increased Dining Out Frequency:** Survey results indicated that 62% of participants reported dining out more frequently after being exposed to foodporn imagery on social media. This was especially common among younger populations (ages 18–35) when the impact of food content that is aesthetically pleasing was more noticeable.
- **Change in Food habits:** According to the statistics, 48% of participants said that they had altered their dietary habits as a result of seeing images of food. These participants indicated a preference for trying new or exotic foods that they had not considered before.
- **Emotional Response:** Survey results supported the qualitative findings, with 87% of respondents reporting strong emotional reactions, such as happiness and desire, when viewing foodporn imagery. These emotional triggers played a significant role in their subsequent food-related decisions, including dining out or attempting new recipes at home.

Table 2. Changes in Dining Habits due to Foodporn Exposure.

Behavior	Percentage of Respondents
Increased dining out	63%
Altered food preferences	41%
Experimentation with cooking	28%
Seeking instagrammable dishes	19%

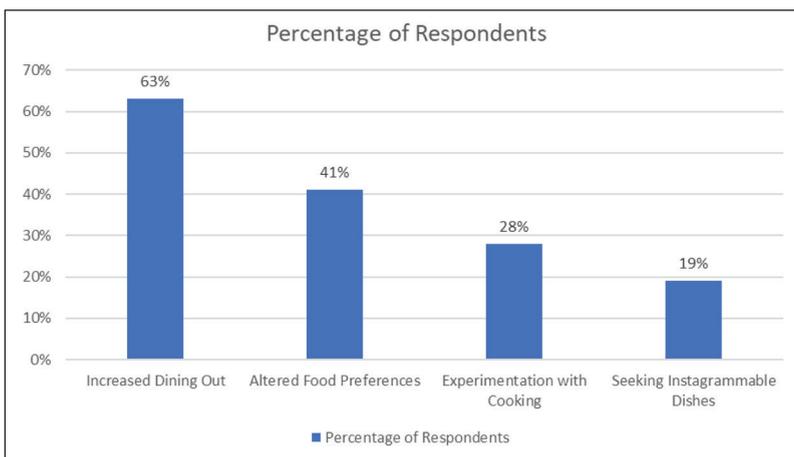


Figure 2. Dining Out Frequency Before and After Exposure to Foodporn.

Marketing Implications

It's critical for marketers to comprehend the impact of foodporn pictures in order to develop successful strategies, as evident from Table 3 and Figure 3:

- The importance of aesthetics: Food producers and establishments have to give careful consideration to the visual presentation of their goods. Our analysis indicates that visually attractive items have a significant advantage in attracting consumers. For instance, 78% of respondents said that they would pay more to eat at a restaurant with aesthetically pleasing food.
- Making the Most of User-Generated Content (UGC): Successful marketing strategies typically use UGC. By encouraging consumers to use a particular hashtag while sharing their eating experiences on social media, businesses may improve brand awareness. An example of this is the #FoodieAdventures campaign at XYZ Restaurant, which increased foot traffic and customer contact by 25% and 40%, respectively.

Patterns of Engagement

The information also revealed clear trends in how people interacted with images of food. Consumers who interacted with food-related information more often

Table 3. Impact of Aesthetics on Restaurant Selection.

Criteria	Percentage of Respondents
Visually appealing food	78%
Price	15%
Location	6%
Online reviews and ratings	1%

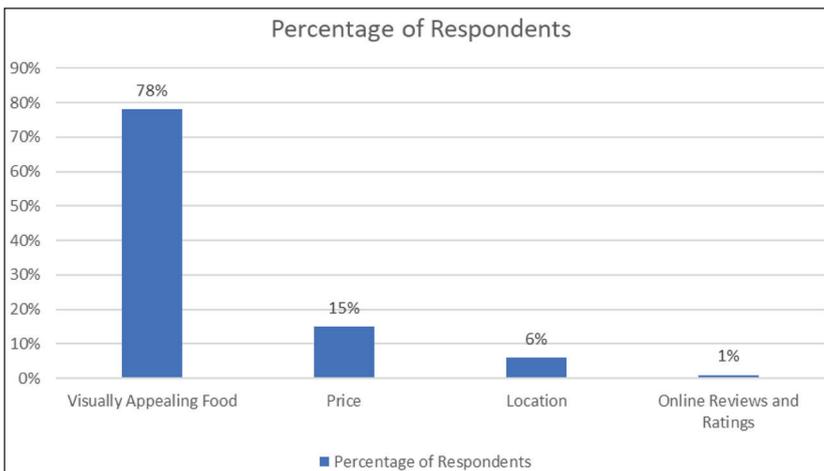


Figure 3. Success of the #FoodieAdventures Campaign.

(daily, e.g.) were more likely to visit certain restaurants or change their purchase habits. Forty percent of the participants said that they were inspired to attempt cooking new foods they had seen online, and 55% said that foodporn photos had affected their choice of restaurant.

Software and Tools Used

NVivo was used to analyze the qualitative data, making it easier to find reoccurring themes and emotional cues in the transcripts of the interviews. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, SPSS was used to examine the quantitative survey data and investigate any connections between shifts in consumer behavior and foodporn images.

Discussion

This research provides novel insights into the influence of foodporn images in social media marketing on customer behavior, specifically on emotional responses, engagement, and purchase choices. This study not only corroborates previous hypotheses but also expands current understanding of the impact of visual aesthetics in digital marketing. This section examines the alignment or contradiction of the results with prior research and explores the wider implications for both scholars and practitioners.

Academic Contributions

This research significantly contributes by applying the TAM and UGT to the realm of foodporn pictures. This study expands upon prior research, which mostly examined generic social media advertising and consumer engagement, by particularly investigating the impact of highly visual food-related material. The results indicate that foodporn imagery serves as a potent psychological stimulus that amplifies customer engagement and influences purchase behavior via emotional reactions. The emotional reactions revealed in this research, including delight, anticipation, and want, correspond with the current literature about the influence of visual stimuli on consumer decision-making. Research conducted by Lim et al. (2017) and Drew et al. (2022) has emphasized the significance of aesthetics in shaping customer attitudes and actions. This study expands on previous results by showing how foodporn imagery elicits more intense emotional responses than other types of social media material. The study's use of NVivo to discern repeating themes offers an innovative method for comprehending the qualitative effects of foodporn on consumer psychology. The identification of themes such as Emotional Triggers, Influence on Dining Habits, and Social Media Engagement provides a more profound knowledge of the mechanisms by which food imagery affects consumer cognition. This addition enhances the current literature by offering a more thorough understanding of consumers' emotional and behavioral responses to visual marketing cues.

Practical Implications for Marketers

This study's findings provide significant insights for marketers and organizations seeking to use foodporn pictures in their digital marketing efforts. The intense emotional reactions elicited by foodporn imagery indicate that marketers may successfully use visually captivating material to enhance engagement and influence customer behavior. Enterprises, especially in the culinary and hospitality industries, must to prioritize the production of superior, visually striking food photography to entice and maintain clientele. The research underscores the substantial influence of UGC on the promotion of foodporn pictures. Motivating customers to share their culinary experiences, alongside collaborations with influencers, may assist companies in cultivating genuine interaction with their audience. The success of initiatives such as #FoodieAdventures illustrates that user-generated foodporn material may enhance brand exposure and foster customer loyalty.

Moreover, the results indicate that visual aesthetics may serve as a crucial distinction in a very competitive industry. Seventy-eight percent of participants would choose a restaurant based on the aesthetic attractiveness of the meal, even at a higher cost, highlighting the need of prioritizing food presentation and photography in marketing campaigns.

Validation and Expansion of Preexisting Research

This research corroborates prior results about the impact of social media marketing while especially concentrating on foodporn photos. This research's emotional and behavioral reactions to foodporn align with findings by Sabate et al. (2014) and McClure and Seock (2020), highlighting the influence of social media content on consumer behavior. This research enhances the field by demonstrating that food-related imagery provokes stronger emotional reactions, subsequently leading to more substantial alterations in consumer behavior, including increased eating out and changes in food preferences. Furthermore, the research posits that foodporn might engender a need for social identity. Numerous individuals said that posting or interacting with foodporn on social media facilitated the communication of their likes and preferences to their social networks. This notion corresponds with ideas of social identity and conspicuous consumerism, whereby customers use things and experiences to exhibit their position and uniqueness. Subsequent study may investigate the convergence of food pornography, social identity, and consumer behavior.

Constraints and Prospective Investigations

This research offers significant insights, however, it has limits. A significant disadvantage is the dependence on self-reported data, which may be prone to response bias. Participants may not consistently provide reliable recollections or accounts of their emotional responses or behavioral modifications. The sample was biased toward younger, social media-literate people, limiting the applicability

of the results to other populations. Subsequent studies need to investigate the influence of foodporn photos on a wider demographic, including older age cohorts and those with restricted social media use. This study concentrated on Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest; however, subsequent research could explore the impact of foodporn across a broader spectrum of platforms, including emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), which may further augment the sensory experience of foodporn. Finally, further research should investigate the ethical ramifications of influencing customer behavior via visually compelling material. As foodporn increasingly influences consumer tastes and behaviors, it is essential to investigate its possible impacts on dietary habits, mental well-being, and body image.

Conclusion

This research offers an in-depth examination of the impact of foodporn pictures in social media marketing on customer behavior. This study demonstrates the significant influence of visually attractive food-related information on customer engagement, emotional reactions, and purchase choices via the application of the TAM and UGT. The results indicate that foodporn imagery substantially influences consumer behavior by provoking intense emotional responses, including pleasure and desire, which result in increased frequency of eating out, modified food choices, and enhanced involvement on social media.

This research enhances the current literature by providing fresh insights into the role of visual aesthetics as an effective marketing strategy in the digital era. The use of NVivo for qualitative analysis facilitated the identification of major themes concerning emotional and behavioral reactions, hence enhancing comprehension of the psychological processes behind consumer engagement with foodporn images.

The report provides pragmatic ideas for enterprises and marketers. It indicates that enterprises in the food and hospitality industries may gain advantages by investing in superior food imagery to entice and keep clientele. Moreover, the smart use of UGC and influencer marketing may augment brand exposure and customer engagement. The significance of producing visually appealing material is clear, as most participants expressed a readiness to patronize restaurants that provide “Instagram-worthy” food, even at an elevated price.

This research has limitations. The dependence on self-reported data and a sample biased toward younger, socially media-engaged persons may restrict the generalizability of the results. Subsequent studies need to broaden their focus to include a more varied audience and investigate the influence of foodporn photos across other social media platforms, in addition to new technologies such as VR and AR.

This research highlights the essential significance of visual material in contemporary marketing, especially with foodporn images. As digital platforms advance, the significance of aesthetically pleasing content will increase, presenting both possibilities and problems for marketers and enterprises. Future studies need to concentrate on the ethical implications of influencing customer behavior via visually stimulating material and the enduring impacts of foodporn images on consumer health and wellness.

Future Research Directions

This study lays the foundation for future research in several areas:

- Exploring the ethical considerations of manipulating consumer behavior through foodporn imagery.
- Analyzing the long-term effects of foodporn exposure on eating habits and health.
- Investigating the role of AR and VR in enhancing foodporn experiences.

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